

The U.S. District Court for the District of Colorado Goes Electronic

The United States District Court for the District of Colorado will shortly unveil a new electronic case filing system. This new system was custom made by the federal judiciary to permit filing of cases through the Internet in more than 200 federal courts. Attorneys practicing in Colorado's federal district court will be required to file documents electronically with the court over the Internet, unless a particular attorney shows "good cause" in writing why the requirement should not apply to her or him.

The system uses standard computer hardware, an Internet connection and an Internet browser. It accepts documents in Portable Document Format (PDF), a configuration which replicates the formatting and appearance of a document as intended by its preparer. The system is easy to use. Filers prepare a document using conventional word processing software, then convert it to PDF. After logging onto the court's website with a court-issued password, the filer fills out several screens with information that serves as the basis for the docket entry, attaches the document, and submits it to the court. The system then generates a notice verifying that the court received the document and automatically e-mails the notice to the filer. Other parties in the case also receive e-mail notification of action in the case if registered in the system.

The system offers users several advantages. The most obvious advantage is full access to current court files, both docket sheets and filed documents. Users can access the system via the Internet from any location twenty-four hours a day. Users can also download and print documents directly from the system, thereby reducing or eliminating mail, courier, and copy fees. The system also does away with the problems of lost files or documents -- and trying to find a parking space by the courthouse!

No *added* fees are charged for filing documents over the Internet, but existing document filing fees still apply. Litigants receive one free look at documents filed electronically in their cases and can print or download the documents at that time. Thereafter, the documents are only available for viewing or downloading at \$.07 per page. This access to court data is provided through the Public Access to Court Electronic Records (PACER) program at a cost of \$.07 per page with a maximum charge of \$2.10, the equivalent of 30 pages, for electronic access to any single document. Users are not billed, however, until their PACER account reaches \$10 in a calendar year. The judiciary has set the fee at the lowest possible level sufficient to recoup program costs, as directed by Congress.

The district court began its implementation project of the system in November 2003 with an expected initial date of electronic filing for civil cases in Spring 2005 and criminal filings in late Summer 2005.

Users wishing to prepare themselves for the advent of the electronic filing system are advised to review their equipment to make certain it meets the minimum system requirements. The court recommends the following hardware and software:

- * IBM-compatible PC or MAC PC

- * For IBM-compatible PC: 486/66-16MB RAM minimum
- * For IBM-compatible PC: Windows 95 or higher
- * For MAC PC: 68040 MAC PC with 16MB RAM minimum
- * For MAC PC: System 7 or higher
- * Internet access
- * Netscape 6.0 or higher; or Microsoft Internet Explorer 5.5 or higher
- * Adobe Acrobat PDF Reader 3.0 or higher or its equivalent (free download)
- * Software to convert documents to PDF format, such as Adobe Acrobat Writer 4.0 or higher
- * Scanner (optional)
- * PACER login and password - potential users of the system should ensure that they have active PACER logins and passwords. For more information about the PACER registration process, go to <http://pacer.psc.uscourts.gov/>.

For more information on electronic case filing in the federal district court, visit the court's website at <http://www.co.uscourts.gov/Dindex.htm> and click on the Electronic Case Filing icon located in the middle of the website. The website offers on-line tutorials and also provides general information about the-system.